

# TIGERSHARK<sup>®</sup> MAGAZINE



ISSUE #4    SPRING 2014    VICTORIANA / STEAMPUNK

# TIGERSHARK MAGAZINE ISSUE #3 SPRING 2014

## VICTORIANA / STEAMPUNK

### *Editorial*

*"In old days, books were written by men of letters and read by the public. Nowadays, books are written by the public and read by nobody."*

— Oscar Wilde

One trusts that **Tigershark** will not fall into the latter category! Especially as this issue has proven so difficult to put together. Having created three previous issues, we have established an idea of just how much will fit into an issue without overstraining David Leverton's ability to put together a new issue within a reasonable frame of time. Whilst, in theory, it would be possible to include ten times as much and just cut and paste it all in, that would necessitate a much blander ezine created with little thought. Given the high standard of so many of the submissions – there was very little that I was willing to reject outright – and the fact that most people sent quite chunky tales rather than slight vignettes, this meant a lot of very good work had to be rejected. Hopefully, you will agree that what you are reading here is the very *crème de la crème*! If you were unlucky and didn't have any work accepted, don't worry, there is always next issue – please do not be dissuaded from trying again.

Now, please, enjoy this issue...

Best, **DS Davidson**

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### *Contents*

#### FICTION

GRAND LARCENY ABOARD GDI RAFFAELLO	6
<i>Mark Mellon</i>	
THE THICKET	17
<i>DJ Tyrer</i>	
A PLAGUE OF DREAMERS	21
<i>Andrew Darlington</i>	
THE LADY AND THE TECHNOCRAT	34
<i>Konstantine Paradias</i>	

#### POETRY

TWO HAIKU	2
<i>DJ Tyrer</i>	
ALBERT TO VICTORIA	3
<i>Phillip A. Ellis</i>	
WINDS FROM AN IMPROBABLE SUN	4
<i>Richard King Perkins II</i>	
BARON	4
<i>JD DeHart</i>	
CHUGGERNAUT	4
<i>Richard King Perkins II</i>	
AN EMPRESS OF MARS	5
<i>Aeronwy Dafies</i>	
STEAMY BELLA DONNA	15
<i>Frederick J. Mayer</i>	
ECHOES OF A POEM BY BRENNAN	16
<i>Phillip A. Ellis</i>	
THE TALKING FLOWER	16
<i>Celine Rose Mariotti</i>	
CHESHIRE SPIDER	19
<i>Frederick J. Mayer</i>	
HAIKU	19
<i>Aeronwy Dafies</i>	
HAIKU	19
<i>DJ Tyrer</i>	
THE OLD ONE & THE STAR SPAWN	20
<i>DJ Tyrer</i>	

## POETRY (cont.)

NUDE WOMEN WITH WINGS ATTACHED	30
<i>Frederick J. Mayer</i>	
THE PROPHET'S HOUSE	31
<i>DJ Tyrer</i>	
PRINCE CONSORT	33
<i>Aeronwy Dafies</i>	
ALICE & THE OLD ONES	43
<i>DJ Tyrer</i>	
SAID THE BALLERINA	43
<i>JD DeHart</i>	
PARASOL	43
<i>Richard King Perkins II</i>	
OF ALICE WONDERING	44
<i>Frederick J. Mayer</i>	



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## ARTWORK / PHOTOGRAPHY

<i>David Leverton</i>	
THE EMPIRE ON WHICH THE SUN WILL NEVER SET	Front cover
VICTORIA / ALBERT	3
GDI RAFFAELLO	14
WELSH POPPIES & GREEN ALKANET	16
OSCAR & SHERLOCK	18
TAURUS STARFIELD	20
MANNEQUIN SILHOUETTES	31
PRINCE CONSORT	33
RAISA & THE TECHNOCRAT	37
ALICE, VISCOUS	43
ALICE BEHIND THE LOOKING GLASS	44

*Frederick J. Mayer*

STEAMY BELLA DONNA	15
A HOUND OF TINDALOS AND THE CHESHIRE SPIDER UNIVERSE	19
ORACLE OF ZHAR'S WONDERLAND	20
WOMEN WITH WINGS ATTACHED	30

## Two Haiku

by DJ Tyrer

Gears and cogs spinning  
Ash falls like snow upon land  
Deader than winter

In a distant land  
Brave lads die for no reason  
Sun never setting



# ALBERT TO VICTORIA

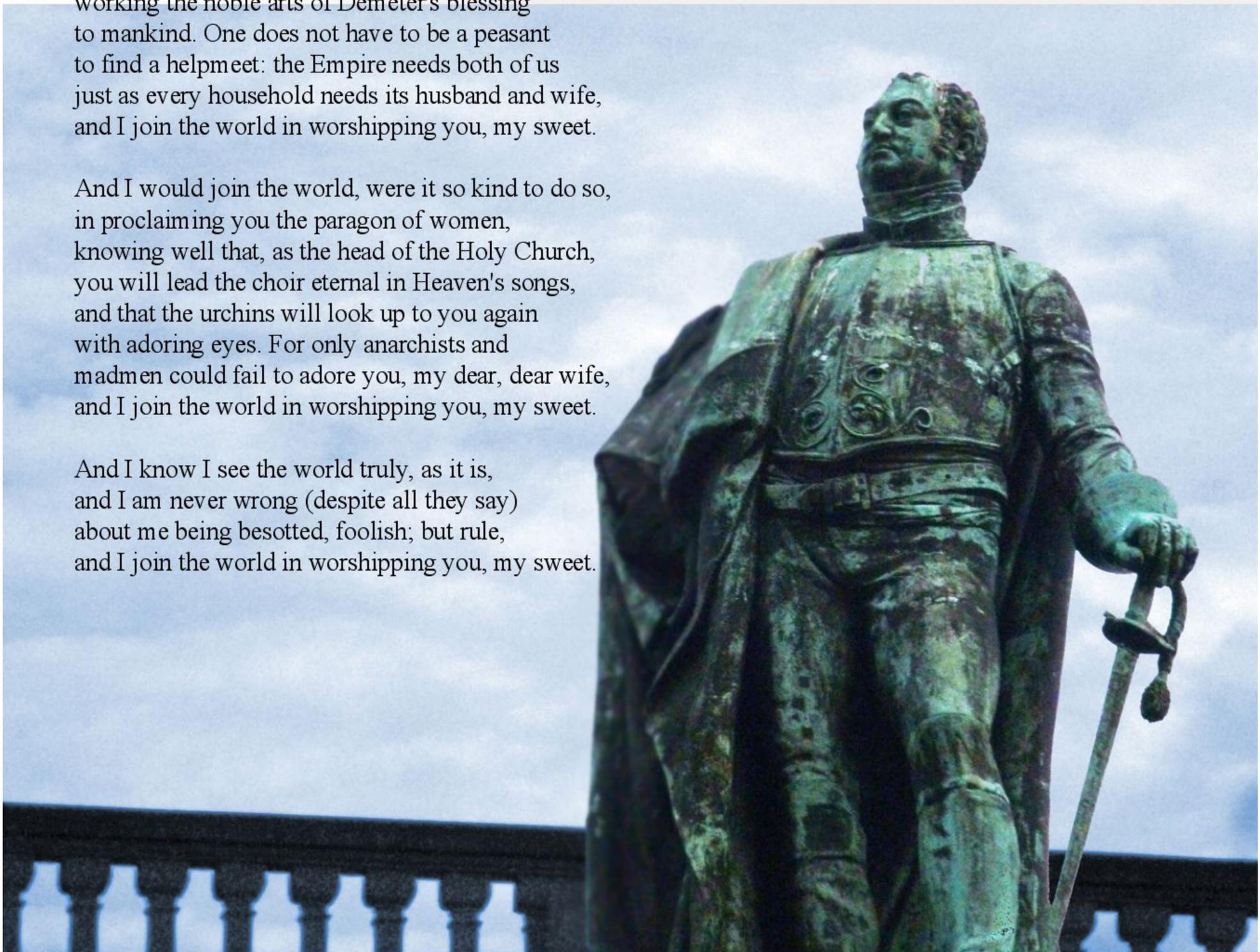
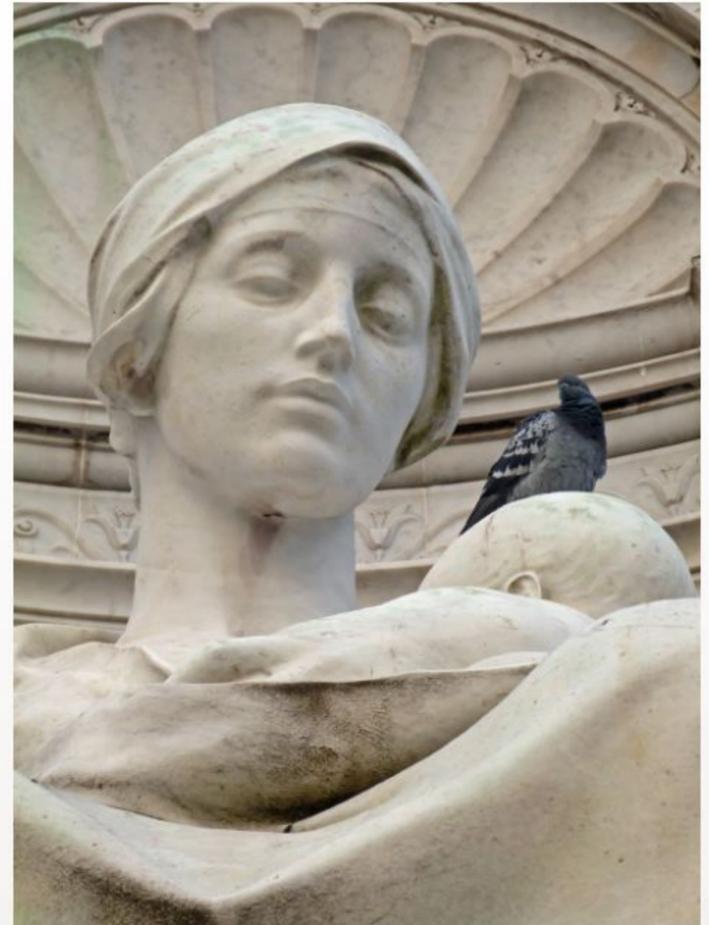
by Phillip A. Ellis

I would have loved you had you been a charwoman toiling on her hands and knees without a single word of French to her name. But then, you are my queen, with most of the civilised world underneath your sway, if I may say it that way, with the jewel of empire happily toiling to bring tribute of grain: that's the sort of woman you are, my love, and I join the world in worshipping you, my sweet.

I would love you just as much as if you had been a fishwife, selling halibuts in the market for a penny a dozen. Or if you'd been working the noble arts of Demeter's blessing to mankind. One does not have to be a peasant to find a helpmeet: the Empire needs both of us just as every household needs its husband and wife, and I join the world in worshipping you, my sweet.

And I would join the world, were it so kind to do so, in proclaiming you the paragon of women, knowing well that, as the head of the Holy Church, you will lead the choir eternal in Heaven's songs, and that the urchins will look up to you again with adoring eyes. For only anarchists and madmen could fail to adore you, my dear, dear wife, and I join the world in worshipping you, my sweet.

And I know I see the world truly, as it is, and I am never wrong (despite all they say) about me being besotted, foolish; but rule, and I join the world in worshipping you, my sweet.



*Victoria & Albert (David Leverton)*

# WINDS FROM AN IMPROBA BLE SUN

by Richard King Perkins II

*"You have sixty seconds to make up your mind."  
— per plures*

In the first second  
winds from an improbable sun  
churn defeated leaves to dust  
and I will not look back at you—  
not once.

In the fifth second  
pallidness banners the jet stream,  
clouding a pristine bounty.  
If I am still a sentient being  
no one is counting.

In the thirtieth second  
lords of consumption  
prune the daintiness of flora.  
A faint species plumes  
from deceitful torpor.

In the fiftieth second  
tangles become geodesic domes  
girded by gaze-laden gravity,  
hopeful comatose homes  
that may syncopate faintly.

In the final second  
a visual convergence.  
All carnal slips and grand accruals—  
I am of beings broken  
into minute-long intervals.

# BARON

by JD DeHart

Notice the monocle first  
It is a mark to impress  
Then the ebony gloves  
How they shine, made to shine

Standing at the helm, the baron  
Watches the machinations below  
Deciding individual fates  
With the orb rotating in his palm

It dances on a set of gears  
Telling him, Live, with a smiling  
Yellow-haired girl, or Cease,  
With the image of an electronic  
Reaper, eyes blinking alarm.

# CHUGGERNAUT

by Richard King Perkins II

The sun, a broken mandala,  
hangs in the sky somewhat crookedly.

Cold rains of April effervesce,  
to bead upon differentially  
an aluminum squash head.

The automaton scarecrow  
offers ambulatory protection

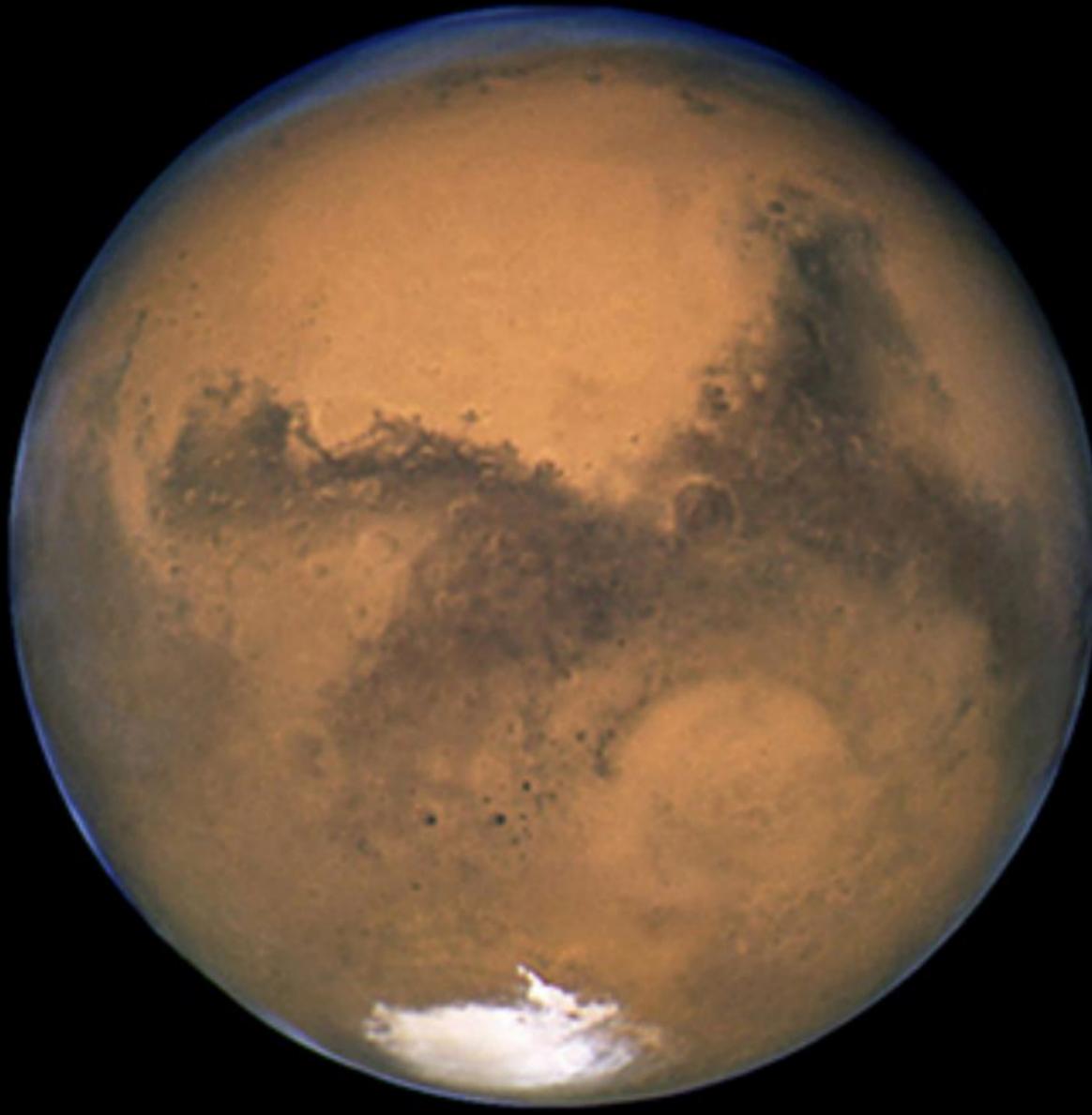
from birds and biting geegaws  
across a chessboard of stellar geraniums.

In lighter-than-air hats,  
occasional gentlemen drift by  
tipping past the busy hedge witch up on Aether Hill

whose heart ticks for a patchwork tinker  
building a vertical steam engine

with pistons aimed directly  
at a mostly fixable star periphery.





# AN EMPRESS OF MARS

by Aeronwy Dafies

India a fine jewel well enough  
But Himalayas cannot compare  
To Olympus Mons  
Nor the Thar Desert  
To red alien sands  
A new title for Her Majesty  
As Her armies arrive stride across red globe  
Enforcing her laws upon that world  
Which has fascinated humanity  
For millennia  
A new era dawning  
A new crown for Victoria to wear  
Looking Venusward

*Mars (NASA)*

# Grand Larceny Aboard GDI Raffaello

by Mark Mellon

2317 GMT, 11/09/64.

Campoleone did the accounts at his desk at the Upper Promenade's center, head bent, indifferent to the magnificent panorama of starry sky above and wintry mountains below visible through the lofty glass ceiling. Grazzini hurried to the purser's desk. About to blurt something out, a sharp look from Campoleone made him remember himself. Grazzini pulled himself together and stood to attention.

"*Si*, Grazzini. *Che cos'è?* What is it?"

Grazzini was visibly sweating. He pulled at his collar as if it choked him.

"Chief Purser, it's just that—"

He bent low and whispered. "*Signora* Longano, the actress. Her jewelry has been stolen. I thought it best to tell you first."

Campoleone laughed, as if Grazzini had told a good story. The night was early. The Upper Promenade was still crowded with the fashionable, slender young women in evening gowns and furs, their silver-haired escorts in tuxedos, sharp Roman noses keen for the merest whiff of scandal or gossip. A few first class guests were already gazing curiously. He stood up and leaned close to Grazzini as if relating his own choice bit of gossip, tit for tat.

"You did well, Grazzini. I expect such discretion from an experienced steward. I'll attend to it right away."

Campoleone snapped his fingers. Second Purser Tortola came running. He knew better than to keep Campoleone waiting. Tortola snapped to attention.

"Take the desk."

Tortola beamed.

"Yes, sir. Will there be anything else, *Signore* Campoleone?"



“Yes.” Campoleone tore a page from a notebook. He wrote a quick, but neat note, slipped it into an envelope, and sealed it.

“See the *Capitano* gets this immediately.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Now come on, Grazzini. Don’t run.”

The two men left the Promenade at a slow, casual walk. This had to be kept quiet, at least until *Capitano* Gracchi knew about it. They walked down the axial corridor that led to the ship’s bow.

The corridor hummed with the steady thrum of three mighty engines at the dirigible’s stern, powered by the nuclear reactor amidship. Long titanium steel propellers frantically spun, driven by a 4,000 hp gas turbine. Two 1,000 hp turbofans operated boundary layer control ducts to reduce drag. Long as three football pitches end to end, the immense airship sped high above the Alps on her regular run from Roma to London at over 175 kph, the *Gran Dirigibile Italiano Raffaello*, showpiece of the Italia Line, a masterpiece of Italian engineering and design. Green, white, and red lights flashed along her sides as she sailed over the snow-clad peaks.

As befit her status as Italy’s most popular actress, *Signora* Longano had a suite of rooms at her disposal on the *Prima Coperta*, the first-class deck, near the restaurant, casino, and nightclub. Campoleone paused at the aluminum door. Despite soundproofing, a ferocious argument could still be heard.

“Don’t tell me I should have left them home after they’ve been stolen. The chicken’s already flown the coop. You irritate me so, you arrogant Spaniard.”

“You call me arrogant when I’m being reasonable this time? *Todos tus palabras son mentiras, perfidia.*”

“*Coglione. Cafone.*”

Campoleone tapped gently on the door. The argument stopped. After a brief pause, a young, dark man in his shirtsleeves opened the door.

“So. Someone finally bothers to show up after we sound the alarm hours ago.”

“Pardon, *Signore*,” Grazzini said, “but it’s only five minutes since I left you.”

“Never mind. Is this what passes for security on this tub?”

“*Primo Commisario Di Bordo* Gaetano Campoleone, at your service.”

“What good is a purser, even the chief? We need a detective, not some grubby accountant.”

“*Capitano* Gracchi is on his way. May we come in please? I’m not a detective, but I’d like to have a look around.”

The man glowered at Campoleone, but then shrugged.

“I don’t see why not, for all the good you can do.”

The high-ceilinged salon was furnished with the latest Ercolini plastic furniture. An insanely beautiful young woman with hair the color of tar sat on the pink amoeboid couch. Tears had streaked her mascara. Campoleone came to attention, snapped his heels together, and bowed.

“*Signora* Longano, forgive my intrusion, but I wish to help. I am Chief Purser Gaetano Campoleone. When did you learn your jewelry was stolen?”

Longano looked up. Her eyes were violet, wide-spaced, and large. She brightened slightly.

“My what a handsome Chief Purser.”

Campoleone was tall and broad-shouldered, the inverted triangle of his torso surmounted by the proportionate one of his head, finished by a strong, pointed chin. The thick wave of his ebon hair complemented the sharp-angled, stylish black uniform of the Italia Line. He smiled, showing white, naturally straight teeth in a swarthy face, testament to his Sicilian heritage.

“How like a woman to be so easily distracted,” the young man said.

“You must excuse my husband, *Signore* Campoleone. Bullfighters are excitable by nature. You’ve heard of the great Manito Estragon, no doubt?”

“Of course. It’s an honor to meet you also, *Señor* Estragon. No casual reader of the newspapers could miss your athletic exploits in the arena of blood and sand.”

Campoleone’s compliment seemed to mollify Estragon to some extent.

“If we could concentrate on the circumstances of the crime,” Campoleone continued, “that would be most useful. When did you discover the jewels were stolen?”

“After dinner. I wanted to change before we went to the casino to watch Manito lose even more money at baccarat.”

“*Dios mio*, woman. I’ve explained it takes time for my system to work.”

“Regardless, when we walked in, the wall safe was open and so was the porthole, and the jewels were gone, including my emerald necklace from the Aga Khan and the diamond teardrop earrings Ari Onassis gave me.”

“Throw your old boyfriends in my face. At least they didn’t steal my suit of lights.”

Estragon pointed to a garish bullfighter suit festooned with multi-colored sequins and gauds, hung from a wooden frame.

“Too bulky. Let me look around.”

Campoleone inspected the open safe and porthole, making sure not to touch anything. He put his head through the porthole and looked around. A row of metal handgrips went down the side.

“Apparently the thief made his escape through the porthole by using the handgrips outside.”

“That’s absolutely mad,” Longano said. “So high up, in this cold? He surely must have fallen to his death.”

“Not if he’s a master cat burglar. The Italia and other lines have been plagued for months now by *Il Volpe*, the Fox. He’s known for cool nerves and daring escapes.”

Campoleone tossed his cap onto a coffee table. He went over to the porthole, grabbed the frame, and coolly levered himself through the porthole legs first.

“Chief Purser, no,” Grazzini said. “Don’t put yourself at risk.”

“No risk is too great when the honor of the Italia Line is at stake.”

“At least wait until the *Capitano* arrives-”

Grazzini’s voice was cut off by the howling wind. Agitated by the mountains and heightened by the dirigible’s speed, the gales threatened to tear Campoleone away from the handgrips and hurl him to certain doom three kilometers below. He could only hang on with all his strength, carefully put one foot after another on a lower handgrip, and move one hand at a time while his feet stayed secure. The moon above was brilliant and full, Diana’s silver light magnified tenfold by pure white snow below. Campoleone was grateful for the bright night, something in his favor.

In the stark black and white of the Alpine night, Campoleone made his way like some patient spider, a black dot on the dirigible’s shiny gray skin. Slowly he climbed down the silver dirigible’s convex side. On the inward slope, Campoleone reached out with his right foot for the next handgrip. Instead of dry aluminum, his shoe touched slick grease.

His foot shot out from under him. He hung by one hand from a grip. The wind would surely pull him away.

Adrenaline pumped. He steeled his nerves, willed himself not to panic, not to blindly flail his limbs. Campoleone grabbed another grip with his free hand. He kicked toward the dirigible with his right foot.

Luck was with him. He caught an ungreased grip. Campoleone hung for a few moments until he could breathe normally. Cautiously, more by will alone than human strength, he made his way down the last few handgrips to the bow’s port cargo bay hatch. He carefully ran a fingertip around the release to make sure it wasn’t greased. Campoleone opened the hatch and went inside feet first. He landed softly on a pile of mailbags.

There was rustling inside the pitch-black cargo bay, too loud for rats. Furtive movements: bare feet padded on a cold metal floor, small feminine teeth chattered. Campoleone shut the hatch and scanned the bay with his pen flashlight. The light found two white figures. One was male, portly, and grizzled, the other female, fair, and thin, both quite naked, caught in a humiliating tableaux trying to struggle into various items of clothing.

“This is a restricted area. Passengers aren’t allowed. Why you came here for this sort of thing completely escapes me.”

The young woman hooked her brassiere together, turned it, and slipped her breasts into the cups.

“Do you see me arguing? It was the old goat’s idea. It was already cold enough until you dropped in out of nowhere. *Madonna*, but you scared me.”

“Please, there’s no need to get upset,” the man said, voice smooth, obviously practiced at talking his way out of embarrassing situations. “You can understand why I’d prefer discretion. I’m sure we can come to some arrangement.”

He reached into a pocket of the pants he’d yet to put on and pulled out a huge wad of lira.

“I can’t be bribed, but never mind that. How long have you been here?”

They both looked puzzled.

“Why?” the woman asked. She was almost dressed by this point. “Do you take a personal interest in such things?”

“Never mind that. How long were you here?”

“At least forty-five minutes. He brought two bottles of champagne, but no glasses. Can you imagine? Said he wanted to get in the mood. Insisted I drink straight from the bottle. All I could think of was how cold it is in here.”

“And no one else came here during that time?”

“Who beside you?” she said. “The man in the moon?”

“All right. Thank you for your information. You’ve actually helped in a very important matter. But now that you’re dressed, I must ask you to leave.”

Campoleone opened a port. The couple went sheepishly before him, still adjusting their clothes. He exited the bay, sealed the port, and bowed slightly.

“I won’t mention I saw you. Please don’t violate the rules again. Good night.”

Campoleone hurried along the bottom deck’s axial corridor. He was soaking wet from his climb outside. He stifled the urge to shiver as his body adjusted to the heated atmosphere. He went through the *Galleria*. This cruise featured an exhibit of Futurist paintings and sculptures, strange, multi-faceted, Cubistic works infused with unnatural

vigor. Campoleone was indifferent. His taste ran to the *Diciassettesimo Secolo* and Caravaggio. The drenched purser provoked wide eyes and shocked gasps from elegantly turned-out art lovers. Indifferent, Campoleone squelched down the hall, his forward stride as purposeful and dynamic as that of the giant, undulating bronze figure by Boccioni in the exhibit.

Campoleone went to the bow elevator, manned by *Uomo D'Equipaggio* Paluzzo. The blue-eyed Genoese burst out laughing.

“Did you decide to save time by showering with your uniform on, Campoleone?”

“Enough lip from you, Crewman. Topside, *rapido*.”

The elevator noiselessly ascended to the top deck. Campoleone ran back to Longano’s suite. The door was open. *Capitano* Gracchi remonstrated with Estragon. A short, older man in a dark suit and wide-brimmed fedora stood nearby.

“*Signore* Estragon, the Italia Line warrants the safety and security of its passenger ships. If you’ve suffered a legitimate loss, we’ll reimburse you.”

“Legitimate? What do you mean by that? That my wife’s jewels weren’t really stolen? You see the open safe and the open porthole before you? It’s plain some experienced thief like the Fox made off with them.”

“That’s not what happened,” Campoleone said.

They faced him. Estragon’s eyes went wide; his swarthy face blanched. Gracchi’s face grew stern. “Chief Purser, you took a needless risk scrambling down the grips like a deckhand. You should have waited for me and *Signore* Antonesci.”

“*Capitano*, I thought myself hot on the trail of a thief with no time to waste. Picture my dismay to find only a red herring with a greased handgrip at the end to slide an unwary man to his death.”

“What, what is he talking about?” Estragon said. “The man’s gone mad.”

“Mad, am I? You looked like you’d seen a ghost when you saw me, Estragon. Surprised I survived your little booby trap?”

“Now see here, Campoleone, you’re making some serious allegations about a guest,” Gracchi said. “I hope you have more to support this than hostile suspicions.”

“I do. No one escaped through the port cargo bay below. The porthole is just a distraction.”

Campoleone moved purposefully toward Estragon’s suit of lights.

“What are you doing?” Estragon said. “Stay away from that.”



“The jewels have been here the whole time.”

A stiletto blade flashed. With one swift, graceful movement, Campoleone slit the fabric wide. Red, green, and blue stones tumbled to the floor.

“See your husband’s treachery laid before you.”

Longano sobbed, a trademark effect. “Oh, Estragon, how could you?”

Estragon showed neither shame nor remorse, but instead sneered.

“Save your histrionics for the silver screen, woman.”

He reached into his cummerbund. A navaja’s long curved blade ratcheted out. “We Catalans have our own knives, Sicilian. And I’ll repay you with mine for your interference.”

The two men faced off. Campoleone held his knife over his head with both hands in the *Quattrocchi* style, ready to dart forward and shove the blade in Estragon’s throat.

“Hold it right there,” a quiet, elderly voice said. “Stop now. I am quite serious.”

Antonesci held a nickel-plated .25 caliber Beretta in his left hand. Despite liver spots and prominent veins, there was no tremor in his grasp.

“Drop that knife, Estragon. I will not hesitate to shoot. This airship is lifted by helium so I run no risk. *D’accordo?*”

The look in Antonesci’s rheumy brown eyes meant business. Estragon scowled fiercely, but nonetheless dropped the knife. It hit the metal deck with a clang. Campoleone grabbed the knife. The burly Gracchi pinned Estragon’s arms tightly behind his back.

“I don’t like people playing games on my ship, *Signore* Estragon. It’s difficult enough not to fly head on into a mountain without distractions from petty criminals. *Disonore*, you disgrace, stealing from your own wife.”

Antonesci pocketed his gun, went to Estragon, and handcuffed him.

“As an official detective of the Italia Line, duly sworn to uphold and execute the laws of Italy, I arrest you, Manuel Estragon, for grand larceny. *Capitano*, if you will detail some crewmen to help me put this man in the brig?”

“No need, Antonesci. I’ll run this miscreant in myself.”

“*Si, capisco*, I understand. Chief Purser, a word before we go. You showed cool nerves and a keen eye, but still, I am curious. When did you tumble to the bullfighter’s ruse? I concede he went about things somewhat cleverly.”

“It wasn’t difficult. Estragon is justly famous for athletic bullring feats, including a stupendous leap onto the bull’s back before he runs him through with a sword. For such an agile young man, it would be no problem to secretly grease the handgrip while we were still in port.”

“That’s right,” Longano said. “I remember he slipped away unaccountably for a short while just before boarding.”

“Further confirmation of his criminal intentions. The theft was simplicity itself. He only had to enter the suite before *Signora* Longano. Estragon opened the safe, hid the jewels in his tawdry suit of lights, and opened the porthole. Everything was set to cry wolf.”

“True again. He left me in the restaurant, said he was nervous about the jewels. Estragon, you lying bastard. Give me one good reason why you betray me like this.”

“Money, what else? My gambling debts are eating me alive. Those jewels would cover them and more. You heard the *Capitano*; insurance would pay for the loss. You’d buy new jewelry, I’d be in the clear, and you couldn’t flaunt your old boyfriends’ presents at me any more.”

Longano ran to Estragon. A solid, well-built woman, she slapped him hard in the chops. Estragon’s head rocked back from the blow. He would have fallen if Gracchi hadn’t held him.

“Get him out of my sight. I’m filing for an annulment. I never want to see or hear of him.”

“That won’t be a problem, *Signora* Longano,” Antonesci said. “*Signore* Estragon can anticipate time in a penitentiary. Perhaps fifteen years on the island of Santo Stefano breaking rocks will teach him to regret his criminal ways.”

Antonesci and Gracchi hustled Estragon toward the door.

“I’d have won if it wasn’t for this meddling Sicilian bastard,” he shouted.

They dragged him away. Longano put her right thumbnail to her upper front teeth and flicked her nail toward Estragon. She burst into tears again and collapsed on the couch. In such a situation, with a distraught woman, what could Campoleone do but sit beside her and comfortingly put an arm around her soft, round shoulders?

“That worthless Catalan heel.”

She looked up at Campoleone. The tears stopped.

“Let’s look at the silver lining. I need a new man. You very much are one.”

Campoleone shook his head regretfully.



“*Ahimé*, alas, *Signora*, the rules are quite strict. Crew must have no private intercourse with guests whatsoever.”

She drew away, the great violet eyes about to well up with tears again. Campoleone took her hand and smiled.

“However, once we dock at Heathrow, I’m no longer on duty. I’m a private person and can associate with whomever I please. And if someone as glamorous as yourself will have me, *Signora*, I’m at your service.”

The tears dried up. She smiled and pulled him close. Campoleone’s own fierce grin blazed. They were both full of Latin fire and eager to live, drawn to each other like two scorching flames, sure to cut a swathe, *una bella figura*, even in Swinging London.



*Italia Line's GDI Raffaello over Buckingham Palace and the Victoria Memorial, as she swings across central London on her way to Heathrow, November 1964. (David Leverton)*



# STEAMY BELLA DONNA

by Frederick J. Mayer

*"I suppose the [human] body to be just a statue or a machine made of earth...  
... [And its] functions follow from the mere arrangement of the machine's organs  
every bit as naturally as the movements of a clock" — Descartes*

Gaslight red district of desiderata  
Blinking reddish eye orbs of Bella Donna  
Tick tick whirl Oh Tock  
Petite morts bordello, immortality

Steam Age Englishman's steamy erotica  
Blossom bed of Night Flower automata  
Tick tick world's cracked clock  
Mechanistic femme galente lacks disease

Shapely Bella Donna she's no Victorian femme de voyage  
Transformer of petite mal male ecstasy poison vintage  
Nude female winged form  
Transcendental ego found in maison de tolerances to please

A corporeal incorporeal quicunque vult fleurs du mal mage  
Industrialized civilized man's clock-workings unwind from cage  
Holy Baudelaire norm  
Venus in ermine fur and shiny sheen love, not given slightly

Porno-deadly made Faery euphonia  
Toffer cogs beautiful scream vagina dentata  
Tick ticking twirling lock  
Age yearning, fear, sated, immortality.

*Steamy Bella Donna  
(Frederick J. Mayer)*

**Author's notes**  
*Most of the terms used in this poem concerning "sexual" topics and machines were actually in use during the Victorian England period. Two that I personally found quite interesting were femme de voyage and quicunque vult.*

*The former could be considered the first blow-up doll; it could be conveniently folded up "into the gentleman's hat for travelling".*

*'Quicunque vult' broadly equals 'whoever wants to'. The Latin was borrowed ironically from the opening words of the Athanasian Creed, a sixth-century devotional — "Quicunque vult salvus esse...", i.e. "Whosoever wants to be saved [must first and foremost hold the Catholic faith]". Somewhere along the way it all evolved to slang for a prostitute: a 'whoever-wants-to-girl', or an 'Athanasian wench'!*



## The Talking Flower

by Celine Rose Mariotti

the talking flower  
talked all night  
she chatted with the other flowers  
till morning light

the talking flower  
talked all day  
she shouted at the bees  
and whistled at the trees

the talking flower  
talked all the time  
she sang to the butterflies  
and recited poetry that rhymed

the talking flower  
talked all night  
she talked to the stars  
shining bright  
the talking flower  
she's out of sight!

## Echoes of a Poem by Brennan

by Phillip A. Ellis

It is easy to dream, and is easy to long  
for a sweeter life, when the lies that are told  
can leave you feeling the world is a cold  
place, that it cannot last for long

in this state. It is easy to dream, then to fall  
into the same routines, those near  
to the heart and head, those routines dear  
to a heart who, when spring is here, says it is fall

instead. Or to hearts who long for a wake  
to end before they'll awaken to mourning, spring  
to receive the joys that depression can bring  
to the maudlin; I'd rather dream, then wake.

# THE THICKET

by DJ Tyrer

It was a well known fact of that autumn of 1829 that Thomas Goodrum of Northfarthing Farm and John Stanton of Little Mucham were in disagreement over a certain area of land. What was not so well known in the locality was just how deep the bad blood between them actually was, at least on Goodrum's side.

It seemed that one autumn evening, Goodrum took up his musket and left his farm for the dark Apple Lane – which John Stanton was accustomed to walk of an evening when returning home from the fields, this being quite a direct route – with the intention of shooting his rival dead, thus bringing their dispute to an abrupt end. It also seemed that he had fixed upon just the right thicket by the roadside from which to fire, it being the most beshadowed of all.

However, as it came to pass, he did neither conceal himself in said thicket nor did he attempt to shoot my good friend John: for when we reached that particular spot (myself having met John in the fields while going about my business and offering to accompany him on his way back to the village), we found Goodrum weltering in the road – his face white as a sheet and his musket cast aside like so much matchwood. Obviously, we rushed to his aid (most likely we would have done the same even if we *had* known his intentions for that night).

“Oh, thank God!” the man exclaimed as we reached him. Realising whom he addressed, he took firm hold of John as the latter bent to help him, and addressed him thus: “John, this very night I planned to take up residence in yonder thicket and shoot you down!” We gasped in surprise at his confession. “Yes, 'tis true!” he affirmed, reading the disbelief on our faces. “I was approaching said thicket when I saw *it...* a dark figure – like a monk – standing in the darkest part of the thicket, beckoning to me... such eyes... and a hand, like that of a dead man... O God save me!” Whereupon poor Goodrum began to sob.

I must admit that as he spoke, I did indeed glance toward the thicket and – just for a moment – I thought that I saw a figure there; though, surely, it was nothing but a shadow. After he had finished his description, neither John nor myself were of a heart to venture an examination of the thicket. Anything which could terrify a man so stout as Goodrum was far too fearsome for us to search out! Instead, we helped carry the half-crazed wight to the village, where my sister tended to his health. After a week, he was fit enough to return to his farm; but I hear that he keeps a brace of loaded pistols and a musket by his bed, and has procured himself three new hounds.

Nowadays, when returning home, the field workers avoid the use of Apple Lane, preferring the longer route of Cherry Street. I, too, am disinclined to use the Lane, except when my needs are most pressing. As to *what* Goodrum saw there, I cannot say – there had been no local lore of a haunting there – though I have heard some in the tavern whisper that it was the Devil calling one of his own.

— Your faithful servant,  
Reverend Charles Winstanley of Little Mucham,  
September, the Year of Our Lord, 1832.



*Sherlock Holmes (Napoleon Sarony, 1882)*



**“WHEN YOU HAVE  
ELIMINATED THE  
IMPOSSIBLE, WHATEVER  
REMAINS, HOWEVER  
IMPROBABLE, MUST BE  
THE TRUTH.”**

**— SHERLOCK HOLMES**



*Oscar & Sherlock (David Leverton)*

**“ONE SHOULD ALWAYS BE  
A LITTLE IMPROBABLE.”**

**— OSCAR WILDE**



*Oscar Wilde (Sidney Paget, 1904)*

# Cheshire Spider

by Frederick J. Mayer

Blue harps on walls  
fade darkly  
upon dawn.

Moon born madness nightly:

daylight crawler  
moonlight dancer.

Timer spins.

Spider grins.

Upon silver strands

always the smile;

amid bluish strings

forever the grin.

*Dedicated to  
Charles Baudelaire  
& Charlene Ungstad*



*A Hound Of Tindalos And The Cheshire Spider Universe (Frederick J. Mayer)*

## HAIKU

by Aeronwy Dafies

Dickens ghost story  
Told beside a roaring fire  
Entertains with spooks

## Haiku

by DJ Tyrer

Rap on Ouija board  
Theosophic mysteries  
Spirit messenger



# The Old One & The Star Spawn

(after Lewis Carroll)

by DJ Tyrer

The sun was shining in the void  
Just another star  
When the Star Spawn arrived  
Having travelled from afar  
Guided to a blue-green world  
By the Oracles of Zhar

The moon orbited casually  
As it had ever done  
A mere shell-casing for  
A long-forgotten Old One  
Visited by no Star Spawn  
Visited by none

In high mountain plateaux  
The Star Spawn came to rest  
And built an Elder Pharos  
As if it were a test  
And in deep caverns they mated  
And began to nest

If you could have seen such things  
You would truly be amazed  
For the Star Spawn are strange matter  
And mostly are unphased  
And anyone who saw such things  
Surely would become quite crazed

About the Elder Pharos  
A city the Star Spawn built  
With pallid towers stretching high  
Doomed curiously with gilt  
And within that city the Law  
Was Do Just What Thou Wilt

It is said that that city  
Time could never overwhelm  
And those towers do yet soar  
In some distant far off realm  
That can be reached by a strange ship  
With no-one at the helm

In a Lamasery therein  
There rules a Lama King  
Dressed in yellow ragged robes  
And a faceplate masking  
The fact that it is not a man  
But some prehuman thing

In the vaults deep beneath  
Behind a warded door  
There dwells another being  
From the time before  
And through it the Crimson King  
Can be heard to snore

And the savants at that name  
Are all known to quake  
And before they dare whisper it  
Precautions always take  
For even the Star Spawn fear  
What shall happen should it wake

Which shall occur at the point  
When the stars do align  
That moment to be presaged  
By the coming of the Yellow Sign  
And the cracking of the moon above  
So King and Old One may entwine

Then when the dream is over  
We shall cease to be  
Human and Star Spawn  
Animal and tree  
Even the world itself  
Both the earth and the sea

The Old One high above  
The Crimson King deep below  
The Yellow Lama in-between  
Knows all there is to know  
And Elder Pharos sets all the world  
Invisibly aglow

Until the end of time  
The approaching doom  
Allows the red-red king  
To rise up from his tomb  
And moon to crack and sun gutter  
Plunging world into endless gloom

Illustration: Oracle of Zhar's Wonderland (Frederick J. Mayer); rendering and Taurus starfield by David Leverton



# A PLAGUE OF DREAMERS

by Andrew Darlington

The water stinks, and burns like acid. Dark eddies as thick as blood swirl around the single oar. He's scared. Although it's chill, he sweats, and can feel each bead of sweat sting its trickling way down his spine. This is the river Styx. The oarsman is Charon. The coracle rasps onto hard shingle. The sound is the scrunching of broken glass. He can't see far, but gets impressions of a sky-tall cave all around, basalt walls warping the death-blackness, stalactites precariously suspended. He steps unsteadily onto the shore. A smiling man in a wheelchair waits.

"A coin," he stammers, "I must pay the ferryman."

"Consider him paid. We use virtual currency here."

"This is Hades, and I am dead?"

"Not quite." He stands up from the wheelchair, the tick of his prosthesis barely detectable. "Don't be so melodramatic. Welcome to Dreamcatcher..."



The Morpheum lies opposite, across the canyon of urban desolation. Tanghe Jrn scurries, crouching insect-like across the rooftop, from the parapet towards the cluster of 'copters. Three of them, rotors thrumming slower through the air, the curved motion reflected in the cowling immediately beneath. Behind the perspex, beyond its reflection, sit helmeted pilots and men in quasi-military garb. Tanghe Jrn skirts clustered pools of festering green rainwater, pulls himself vertical as rotor-wind tousles his dark hair, then up to the waiting 'copter slide-door above its skids.

"It's in disarray as far as I can make out. Skeleton staff. The rest are in the streets. Shouldn't be too difficult to get inside." He's thirty, give or take a few years. Less confident than he pretends to be.

Benyon, older and more assured, resembles a leather-clad automaton, helmet with 'phones and goggles eclipsing his face. "Couldn't be more opportune. But we've got to be precise. Can't afford to lose time or men. We get in there, get Aldous out – and home!"

Radio etheric washes around them. Rotors hiss, lashing the frigid air. The 'copters rise in ragged formation, one, two, three. Soon, Tanghe Jrn is watching the shattered Eastern European city turn beneath them, spread like a relief map as they gain height. He'd once assumed that, over the last few years as the Dreamers re-awoke, the continents would become thronged with starving masses. Yet the city looks deserted. Only a pall of smoke to the mountains west and the occasional ebb and flow of distant crowd-noise warns of habitation. The silent flash of explosions erupting from the planes of abandoned tower-blocks, the random ant-movement of troop-armour



crawling towards the conflict zone.

“There’s no way resources can be deployed to save them all,” his Father, half-a-world away had said. “Social upheaval will run its course. If civilization in any form is to be preserved, it must survive in secret cells, like the one we have here. It is vital for us to live now, for the sake of the future. All we can do is stay aloof while the masses destroy themselves, salvaging what we can.”

Tanghe Jrn had looked out, through the panoramic wall-window across the idyllic tropical island to where the Pacific tide beat its litany. “Hasn’t that always been the way of the wealthy?” he’d replied at length.

Now his ’copter moves towards the flat roof of the immense Morpheum, dwarfing every other building in the city. As pre-arranged, the other two ’copters go in first, strafing its defences. Return fire is sporadic and uncoordinated.



Muddy squalls attack the drab sky over the shingle incline as the battered Hummer slows to a stop at the forward trench. An explosion turmoils mud and stone into the saturated air, turning the dismounting men into orange monochrome patterns. For a moment the driver – Whitehead – watches the eruption subside, the water-colour landscape re-assembling itself beyond the sudden crater, the city sprawled across the valley floor. Across a surrounding landscape that is an ancient kaleidoscope of ghostly Byzantine churches and dirt-poor Kurdish hamlets.

He glances back the way they’ve come. They’re located a clutch of clicks up the slope from a deserted peasant village of dull stone, with its ancient squat church. He’d checked inside, seen its symbols of unquestioned faith in reluctant shafts of light, ikons, tall ornate candles and rich tapestries dating back centuries to the expulsion of Turkish influence from these mountains, Balkan Mater Dolorosa – is that Orthodox or Catholic...? He forgets, all abandoned to the endless conflict. Left by refugees now scattered across the bleakness of the cold slopes. An alien incomprehensible people, who accept suffering as they accept rainfall. Many fugitive families carry their own Dreamers with them.

Reluctantly, Whitehead follows two officers down the clay steps into the trench. A soldier in dirty civilian dress salutes, leads them off down the warrens towards the admin bunker. Whitehead moves with careful slowness; the ground underfoot is spongy, mud coated with layers of sacking. There are occasional soldiers loosely huddled in drab coteries who dart hostile glances as sharply pointed and precise as sniper’s bullets.

“War’s the only stability left,” the rebel officer is arguing. He has a sneaky expression. Or is that just Whitehead projecting his own prejudice? The bunker is damp, badly lit by a bare bulb swaying from the wet-patterned ceiling. A bulb wired up to a car battery on the map-table. “The army’s always had two roles. To counter opposing forces outside the national borders, and to destroy those opposing authority within them. But things are confused, authority shifts, and loyalty becomes negotiable. What price authority now? Who foots the bill?”



“We’re not expecting loyalty to government,” Captain Greaves argues back. “More is at stake than that. The survival of civilisation itself. All over the world Dreamers are waking. The political maps are being redrawn according to new power-structures. Nothing can alter that. All we can strive to do is ensure our bloc emerges advantageously. This is the basic ethic of survival. If we’re to compete in these new circumstances at all effectively, then we’ve got to get as many of their best Dreamer-brains as we can – before they wake!”

The representatives of the mutinous division seem unimpressed. To Whitehead, they look more like brigands. They’ve already worked out their own ethics of survival...



“You were Dreamers. You, you and you. All of you,” says Tanghe Snr from his rostrum wheelchair. “This you probably already know, even though it happened while you were dreaming. But I’ll reiterate anyway. The effects of the ‘Dreamer Plague’ were multiple. With three-quarters of the world population inoperative, city, nation, industry and agriculture shuddered to a halt. The Dreamers sleep, their shallow breathing barely detectable, consuming nothing, yet still alive, still aging naturally. They can be maimed or killed, they can be moved about, stored in vaults or State Morpheums adapted for the purpose. But try as we might, they can’t be wakened. Over the first ten years any semblance of order rapidly devolved. Industrial complexes were abandoned and left to rust, cities to decay, while smaller self-sufficient units survive. After the disruptions of that first decade – war, revolution and territorial dispute subside around new boundaries. Epidemics from rotting cities spread and burn themselves out, until something like order, of a kind, began to re-emerge.”

“Then, twenty years after the plague began, it tipped over into its second phase. The Dreamers began to wake. Confused, frail, dehydrated, scarce able to stand. Many, without assistance, fail to survive their reawakening. Yet a population that had retracted to the level of small communities, suddenly doubled – in a world of vast dead metropolises and the corroding husks of disused machinery. New disorder and famine happened on an unprecedented scale.”

The tri-D projection fades and adjusts. Tanghe Snr stands up for emphasis, the tick of his prosthesis barely detectable as lights come up in constellations across the lecture hall ceiling.

“You were Dreamers, rescued from the chaos embracing the world at the point of your awakening. You were brought here, to the safe enclave of my island, to work together for a future that is ours to claim. You were selected, and retrieved, because your specialised knowledge adds to the reservoir of specialisations we already possess. Together we can create an indispensable force for the phases of planetary reconstruction to come. We will not simply retro-engineer the old world. No-one wants that. No, we start again, we do it better. This is our one unique opportunity to configure our own destiny according to reason and logic. We can do this. But that means we need the best minds, the best people to do it. At this very moment my son is away in Eastern Europe on just such a rescue mission, part of a new recruitment program...”



The first 'copter circles down, flecked with startles of gunfire. It levels off, spilling a tight knot of troopers across the gaunt desolation just beyond the Morpheum blast-apron perimeter. Flak explodes around each descending figures as they assume defensive formation. The second 'copter makes a frontal run at the building, automatic fire wrenching gouges of flame from its ornate facade. The security inside is uncoordinated, under-strength and taken unawares, but already their targeting is getting more focused.

At the same time, Benyon's craft – the third 'copter – reaches the broad plateau of the roof without incident, spewing out its snatch squad of men. Coordinated by Benyon's shouted commands, but led by Tanghe Jrn, they're soon racing towards the cube-structure at its centre. The defenders inside put up a token struggle, their numbers depleted as attention was diverted, as planned, to the frontal attacks. Grenades spider its plate glass, throwing uniformed men across banks of sparking instruments. Tanghe Jrn leads the way into the cube, through to the lift-shafts that drop away deep into the floors below.

There's no opposition until they hit level twenty-three where a gun-battle delays the assault by valuable ten-year moments. The snatch squad blasts its way by sheer fire-power through the better defended transition from the twenty-first century add-on, to the core-complex. An odd contrast, chandeliers and faded carpets, a curving staircase lined with framed portraits, Hapsburg or Austro-Hungarian, original or looted, then there are limb-thick cables and pulsing liquid-tubes too. And there's the location problem. They'd studied and memorised holo-floorplans. But that was different to being here, under attack, with time ticking away. The troopers maintain an uneasy vigil over exits as Tanghe Jrn and Benyon, in his tight leathers, begin to access the files. The encrypted pulse-sequences scrolling the luminous panels hold the key to the location of close on a million Dreamers laid out over hundreds of levels, many sub-surface. They need just one name.

Tanghe Jrn massages sweat across his forehead. *"The application of logic and reason, empowered by the imposition of will, can assume control of human destiny,"* his father had lectured at him, enjoying his own eloquence. *"We can shape a better future. Hope is within our reach. To take the alternative view – that history is random, an endless cycle of power-games, wars and tyrannies until the sun cools and the Earth dies – is a vision that lacks even the faintest sniff of hope. We've been gifted the chance, we can't duck it now."*

For vague pragmatists, he mused, they've done a pretty good job on this Morpheum. A former palace from the time of empires, spiral fairytale towers and corniced galleries, spatchcocked together into new-brutalist extensions. As seconds tick away he's almost intuitively aware of the alarms their every move must be springing, spy-lenses taking constant sweeps, defenders mustering for a counterattack, ready to destroy the intruders. Sickness cants in the pit of his gut.



During recess they chat.



“When we were Dreamers, I wonder what we dreamed. What dreams do you dream during twenty years of deep REM-sleep?” from a tall nervous-looking Asian woman in spectacles.

“That’s not the point,” from an unkempt balding middle-aged man. “It’s not what Dreamers dream, it’s the fact that they *do* dream. There are people who know. There’s sat-data from the dark side of the moon. A filmed record. That’s where the dream-eaters built their installation, to siphon off our dreams. Human dreams are like drugs to them, like high-grade narcotic. They upload and trade them across the Galactic Federation.”

“Yes, there are those who deny the Dreamer Plague is a natural occurrence,” concedes Tanghe Snr from the rostrum. Obviously they are wired, and he hears it all. “Stories have been rife since the Plague began, of UFO activity over Antarctica. Disjoined due to the social instability at the time. But there are tales of alien fleets constructing vast underground complexes beneath the icecap, from which to emerge to invade what’s left of human institutions.”

The assembly, some thirty oddly assorted academics react without humour. They share the same pale cadaverous appearance of the newly awakened.

“There are no aliens. There never were any. We are alone. Neither was there an accidental leak of bioengineered pathogens. Others claim it’s nature’s way of resolving the overpopulation crisis, a Gaia process to tame us. Maybe that’s what it is. Humans were getting too numerous, too ravenous at devouring natural resources, corrupting, chomping our way through everything, driving other species to extinction. The world is a complex self-regulating ecosystem with its own checks and balances. When the human animal got out of control, it was tamed. Simple as that. Me? I neither accept nor deny.”

“But even if you discount those stories as scaremongering, it leaves the residual question – why has it happened? What intelligence, if any, guided it? Has it happened in the past, on a smaller more localised scale, has it even been responsible for wiping out entire prehistoric civilizations? And is it likely to recur?” from the Asian woman in spectacles.

“Divine intervention?” suggests Tanghe Snr with the cynicism that’s been his trait since he’d first achieved international prominence, renown and wealth, in the years before the Dreamer Plague, by seabed mining. Posing, and then answering his own question. “All that quasi-mystical stuff is a diversion. As far as we can tell, with minor regional variations that cancel each other out, the plague is random. It ignores nationality, gender, blood-group, diet. It’s a medical condition on a pandemic scale, yes, but nothing supernatural. A kind of mutated narcolepsy. It can be diagnosed. Maybe it can be cured, given time. We’ve made some initial progress...”

Those watching most closely note that Tanghe Snr’s feet are not actually contacting the stage, but are hovering just above it. And that as he speaks, his height from the rostrum is increasing, he’s ascending, so that it becomes more and more noticeable. Ha! So he’s not actually here. He can’t even be bothered to make a personal

appearance. This is a close-relay, or a recorded projection. The speed of his ascent is increasing. He's suspended man-high in mid-air. Theatrical, an impressive show, though.



“I lived with her for about eighteen months in a basement squat in Hampstead. A good eighteen months. We took walks across the Heath a lot, watched sunsets, lay in bed doing Glide, getting high, drank coffee, listened to John Coltrane on the battery stereo, stuff like that. We could measure out our relationship in coffee dregs and soiled sheets. 'Course, I was only in my early twenties then. The first years after the Plague hit the south-east.”

The drizzle ceases, the shingle road glistening with its residue. The low-roofed buildings stand out starkly three-dimensional against the sky. It is almost beautiful. Whitehead's eyes are reflected in the window, but they focus outside the glass, beyond the Hummer parked in the rutted road. The calm is deceptive. As he watches he talks softly to the woman, in a language she probably doesn't understand, while the rich aroma of coffee drifts from the neat sideboard.

The woman sits quite still in an elaborately-embroidered chair, watching the back of his head. This soldier who has invaded her home. The foreigner who has thrust himself into her life. Occasionally she shifts attention to the officers at the table who concentrate on random noises from their mobiles. She'd seen armies moving to and fro across the valley, seen the deaths, and the refugees, and she'd chosen to stay.

“She was married when we first met, and a little older than me. She had two kids, but they'd been taken by the Plague and she'd lost contact. She talked a lot about going north to find them. Stretches of motorways were still usable if you had petrol and the correct permits. Once or twice we even started out, and I drove her awhile – once we'd motored outside the hub the city grew more eerie and deserted, overgrown and already decaying. First time we had to turn back. Looters had mounted roadblocks. I watched the side of her face as we drove, and her eyes as she lit a cigarette. She had a quick nervous way of inhaling the smoke, yet delicate, with eyes that would never meet mine for longer than a moment, she was strung out on pain, remorse, guilt – and probably fear in there too. Yet despite everything, it was a good time for me.”

Whitehead reaches across to the sideboard, taking his eyes momentarily from the road. American coffee. It was years since he'd tasted it. He wonders just how much was stashed away by families in remote areas, salvaged from city stores and hidden away for the future.

Captain Greaves is speaking into the mobile. Somewhere high above them, neglected and untended, the comsats are still orbiting. He is reporting the failed negotiations with the mutinying troops, and his strategic withdrawal to requisition what he terms 'this civilian property', in this peasant village. He goes on to enumerate the obstacles preventing achieving his military objective, of reaching the Morpheum within the critical time-window. His troops will defend and maintain their current position if attacked, but refuse to launch a counter-initiative until their demands are



met. How long before they begin to desert more frequently, and in greater numbers? Abandoning even the last vestiges of loyalty and discipline? The possibility of open violence directed at officers could no longer be discounted.

The options are clear. If the target can't be captured it must be destroyed, rendered useless to the insurgents. Long-range drones can perform the task, with heavy armour providing back-up, before turning artillery against the rebel trenches...

“Then she was gone. I'd been out scavenging, and when I got back she was no longer there. The flat seemed unnaturally empty, huge. There was grease congealing in pans, but not even a letter. It seems so crazy and pointless to leave that way. But it's all pointless, I guess. It was soon after that I decided to join up. Do the UN thing...”

There is movement beyond the window. In his haste, Whitehead dislodges the coffee and it explodes across the floor. Hot liquid soaking into the carpet, steam dancing above the spreading damp-stain, as the soldier levels his rifle at shadows...



“Say, you live to be seventy-five, eighty-five, ninety if you're lucky. You'll spend something slightly less than a third of that time asleep. So is that lost time? No, of course not. Sleep is a vital function, during which brain activity continues, ordering and filtering experience. It's all part of the lived-experience. Dreamers merely compress that down into a twenty-year block. Must that be lost time...? It's an extreme locked-in syndrome. But the mind doesn't have to be a locked cell. Listen...”

The virtual content of the presentation is shifting, with Tanghe Snr hovering above it, directing it all. “You'll have heard of, and maybe experienced, the bizarre apocalyptic dreams Plague victims are said to have. And after all, during their two-decade sleep the machinations of the subconscious can surely be expected to come up with some pretty alarming results. Some say distinct patterns can be mapped. As if they're premonitions of a kind. An anticipation of a new evolutionary upshift... which, of course, spawns lunatic new religious cults. Not to mention allegations that during the chaos, all human leaders have been replaced by cybernetic alien androids, in preparation for a planetary take-over. Well, ladies and gentlemen, I may have prosthetics, but I can assure you, I am no robot.”

There's a smattering of polite laughter, as the vista beneath the suspended figure shifts vertiginously. A deep valley made up of row upon row of perspex coffins. At first it seems a variant on every other Morpheum constructed by regimes and private corporations across the world to preserve and nurture sleeping Dreamers. Except for the complex web of leads interconnecting them into each other. “Wasted time... no, not necessarily. Dreamspace can be made a shared experience. Collectively, working together around the clock, intuitive conceptual leaps can be made that no single intelligence could otherwise make. If they are the correct Dreamers, linked into the right circuitry.”

“The fact is that any slight alteration to the status quo results in massive new power alignments, brought about through the escalation of new conflicts, subsequent attempts at repression and control, and the intervention by what remains of UN forces.



Despite revolutions, sectarian and factional infighting, it still goes on all around us. Israel was submerged as its government, bureaucracy and military ceased to exist. The Indian subcontinent erupted in revolution and religious extremism, while across America corporations collapsed as the economy imploded, with assassinations and random shootings. There are new Soviets in what was left of the Russian Federation. Earth has lost an entire generation. A twenty-year gap in the birthrate. Twenty years during which children have become a rarity. It's too early to predict what the long-term effects will be, in the immediate future. In a century, if the question is allowed to resolve itself. Or what price is yet to be paid for our planned reclamation..."



They are trapped in a labyrinth of freezing corridors, lined with banks of air-conditioned 'coffins' in neatly-ordered ranks. Each coffin contains a Dreamer awaiting its moment of waking. Their presence is unnerving. Tier upon tier of the living dead. It was an old building. A palace. Adapted and reconfigured to its new purpose. Now shots ricochet as the defenders close in.

Tanghe Jrn is scared. The essence of the plan was timing. But somewhere along the line, something had come loose, something had gone disastrously wrong. Held up in admin while its memory was rifled for the exact location spec. Then withdrawal down to the level where Dreamer Aldous is secreted. Time ticking away as the triage team recover the body, going through decontamination procedures, as drips and monitors are recalibrated. And all the while, the security teams regrouping, organising their retaliation, blocking sealed airlock exits, forcing the interlopers deeper into the maze of catacombs, lost and trapped in its warrens.

Then the first of the explosions shakes the massive building. The attack pauses just as abruptly. Tiny plumes of dust cascade from the trembling ceiling into cones of yellow illumination cast by drably inefficient striplighting. Then the second and third explosions, distant, muffled, yet quaking the floor. And Benyon seizes the lull, with a series of short sharp bursts with his machine-pistol he advances up the corridor to where the confused Morpheum defenders fall back before his sudden initiative. Tanghe Jrn and the tight knot of troopers follow his lead, carrying the inert Dreamer between them.

Each brittle startle of gunfire freezes logic and the process of thought. There are uniformed foreigners sprawled dead, their blood spreading stains across threadbare carpet, while automatic weapons chatter at them from some way ahead, then somewhere behind them too. Confused yells and running feet, silhouettes impaled by numbing detonations of flame. Then they've reached a viewing gallery. Somehow they've missed the lift-shafts in their confusion. A huge panorama looks out over the city. Outlying districts visibly greening as nature encroaches. Black craters mark the sites of explosions and forgotten conflagrations. Somewhere out beyond its limits a timed series of light-bursts indicates the military frontline.

"We have no option." Even without helmet, 'phones and goggles, Benyon still resembles a leather-clad automaton.

"We can't risk a reveal that will draw attention to the Dreamcatcher. We can't, not



yet, it's too early."

"Look, your name is Tanghe, that gives you right of command. But this decision needs to be made. If you won't do it, we're all lost, and so is Dr Aldous." He turns his machine pistol to the panoramic glass and fires a long splintering line across its curve. Old architecture. If it had been reinforced there'd be no way out. A cascade of glittering fragments. Then wind sighs into the sudden space around gargoyles on the guttering.

Benyon glances across. Waits for the word. Tanghe hesitates longer than he should.

"C'mon, the word if you please. Let's do this. Let's do this now."

Loss of face. He's indecisive, just as Dad always said. A swift nod. "Yes. Do it." He thumbs the stud. The snatch-team and their burden wink into invisibility. They step out through the shattered glass to stand in mid-air, suspended on contra-grav, and accelerate upwards towards the distant roof as a new series of massive explosions rock the Morpheum. Moments later they emerge into sudden air, across the featureless plain of ferrocrete towards the impatient 'copters. Then the monolith, already cratered and ravaged with debris, is dropping away beneath them.

"Local war," yells Benyon above the rotor din. "The remnants of a UN mob is shelling the Morpheum, trying to trash it. The core of that thing was reinforced to withstand a nuclear strike, but they're not doing too badly with conventional long-range shells. With all that going on no-one's taking notice of our innovative tech."

"Let's hope so. There are watchers with zooms down there."

The 'copter carrying the newly-recruited Dreamer Aldous, for whom the snatch operation had been mounted, links up with its two fellows, controls spun to retreat. Tanghe Jrn feels sick in the pit of his stomach.



Perspective tilts alarmingly. Down. Hurtles at dizzying speed along rows of interlinked coffins. It pauses, as though hesitating. Focuses on one of them, a single coffin, but radiating a dense web of tubes and wiring. The identifying plaque says 'Tanghe Snr'. The Dreamer who controls it all.

"This is Hades, and I am dead?"

"Not quite, Doctor Aldous." His host stands up from the chair, the tick of his prosthesis barely detectable. "Please don't be so melodramatic. Welcome to Dreamcatcher..."

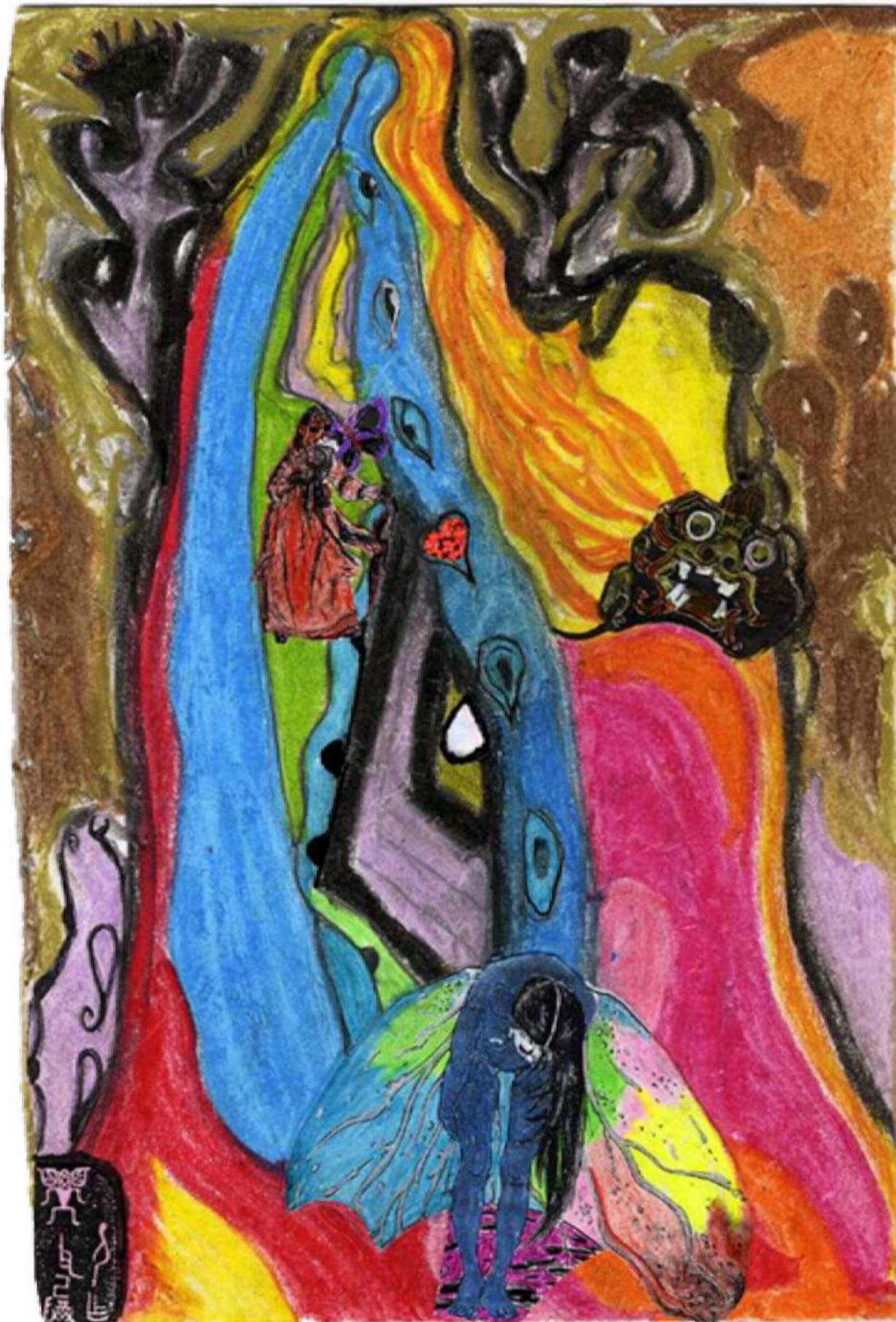


## Awen Online #11

– Poetry on the theme of 'Forgotten Futures'.  
Featuring poems by Aeronwy Dafies, DS Davidson, David Edwards,  
Phillip A. Ellis, David Leverton and Stacy Law.

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<http://atlanteanpublishing.blogspot.co.uk/>

ATLANTEAN  
PUBLISHING



*Women With Wings Attached (Frederick J. Mayer)*

## NUDE WOMEN WITH WINGS ATTACHED

by Frederick J. Mayer

I was raised  
on faerie tales  
but my castles  
have been burnt  
razed.

Why did they all end?  
Pick the costume  
that I shall wear,  
a something  
beyond the veil,  
I'm now your soul kitchen

That walks the streets.  
I am the frozen flame fair;  
I'm the necropomposity  
of the city  
that you meet.

We caught the tread of hurried feet,  
Striding down the dark, foggy street,  
And stopped beside the Prophet's House.

Within, accompanied by jeers,  
We heard the sound of awful tears  
That seemed all hope and joy to douse.

Strange life-like clockwork mannequins,  
Stiffly miming all human sins,  
Silhouettes upon the curtain.

We observed carnal shadows play,  
Move and thrust and then jerk and sway:  
Passionate, wanton and certain.

Then the figures commenced to dance,  
Mechanically began to prance,  
To the sound of that bitter cry.

Moving first fast then moving slow,  
Past curtained window each would flow;  
Now we heard nought but a soft sigh.

Sometimes clockwork puppets would pause,  
Although we never knew the cause,  
And one began to softly sing.

One horrible marionette,  
A tall, raggedy silhouette,  
Stood still and lordly as a King.

Turning to my True Love, I cried,  
"The twin suns set and day has died,  
The dark stars fill the sky above."

But she – she was tempted by sin  
And stepped quickly, my Love, within:  
Truth vanished with my only Love.

A phantom on curtain appeared,  
As through the dusty panes I peered,  
An echo of my one desire.

And down the lonely empty street,  
The Stranger crept on nimble feet,  
Caused me silently to expire.

# THE PROPHET'S HOUSE

by DJ Tyrer

(AFTER OSCAR WILDE)



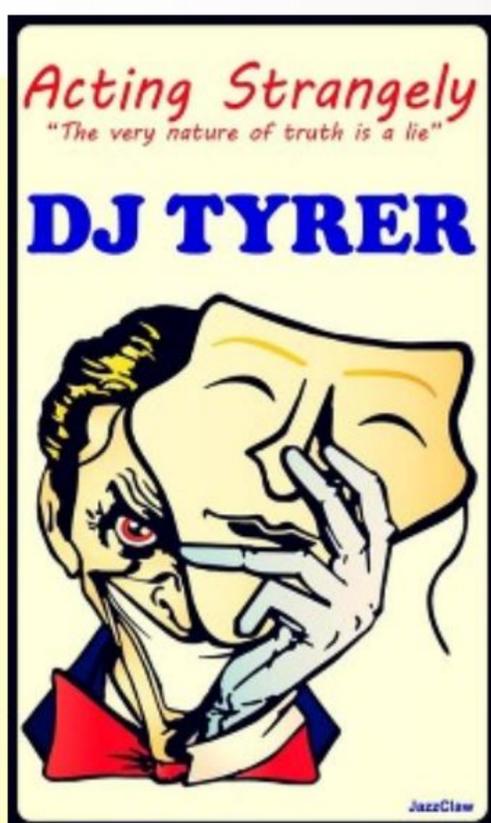
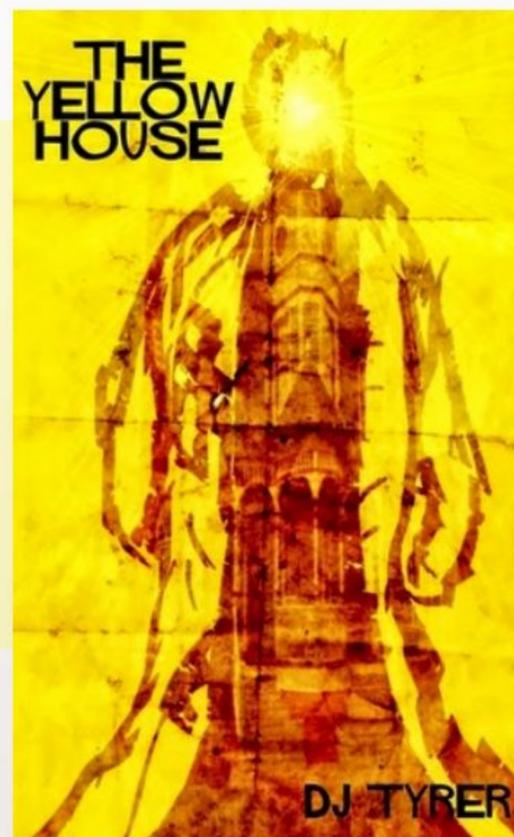
*Mannequin Silhouettes (David Leverton)*

Available now on the Kindle

*Acting Strangely* (from Jazzclaw Publishing)  
and *The Yellow House* (from Dynatox Ministries International)  
are two 'Yellow Mythos' novellas by DJ Tyrer.

### *The Yellow House*

Magical realism and surrealism blend into yellow decadence within the walls of The Yellow House as Sylvia seeks to learn the secrets that the peculiar building contains and resolve her feelings for her mysterious cousin, Camilla. Temptation forces her to consider just how much she is willing to risk to satisfy her curiosity.

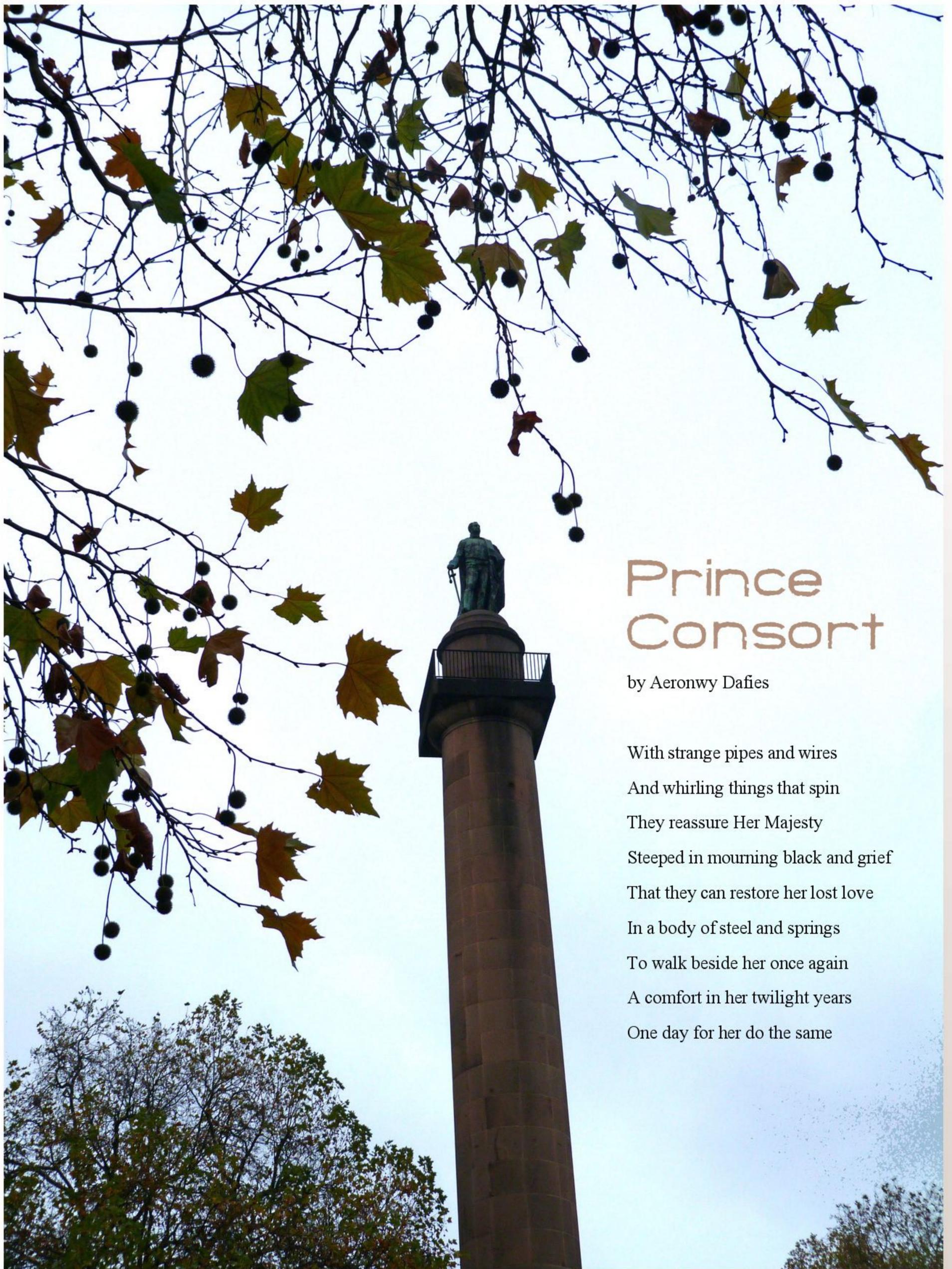


### *Acting Strangely*

Fast cars, fast women, booze and pills, a new and peculiar project: Sebastian Park is acting strangely. But, is it merely a mid-life crisis, a nervous breakdown or something far stranger? Do the answers lie within the musty pages of *The King In Yellow* or in his troubled personal life? And will he survive to discover the truth?

*"The very nature of truth is a lie," commented the Purple Jester. Gasping, his chest tightening with the repetitive exertions, he couldn't help but feel as if she were slowly draining his life from him. Looking up he stared at her face, which seemed hideously like a waxy mask, pasty and lifeless, a parody. His vision seemed to swim and his head spin, it was as if she sucked his life out through her primal action and he fell into an all-encompassing darkness...*

*To learn much more about the Yellow Mythos and the mystery and horror of The King In Yellow, visit The Yellow Site: <http://kinginyellow.wikia.com>*



# Prince Consort

by Aeronwy Dafies

With strange pipes and wires  
And whirling things that spin  
They reassure Her Majesty  
Steeped in mourning black and grief  
That they can restore her lost love  
In a body of steel and springs  
To walk beside her once again  
A comfort in her twilight years  
One day for her do the same

*Prince Consort (David Leverton)*



**TIGERSHARK**

# THE LADY AND THE TECHNOCRAT

by Konstantine Paradias

My name is I'Timad Ibn Suffir, but they refer to me as the Technocrat. Unlike you, I was not conceived by way of coitus or brought to this world via the process of gestation. Yet I was borne into the mind of a great savant and birthed through decades of his personal toil. While my birth was not the result of a lucky sperm reaching the promised egg, it was a result of toil and cogs, each created and refined with surgical precision.

I am told that my movement comprises of exactly nineteen thousand, three-hundred and two brass cogs, powered by an iron mainspring, which (when uncoiled) reaches nearly a kilometer in length. My balance wheel, it is said, is the size of a human heart, an impossibly fine thing that rotates in perfect semicircles, balanced on a dozen unrefined rubies, torn from the heart of a dormant volcano. My escapement mechanisms are stern, angular works of art, wrought by iron, each adorned with ornate engravings, whose beauty is lost to everyone but the most determined of technicians.

My visage (according to the accounts stored in the etchings of the wax cylinders that comprise the sum of my knowledge) is made in such a manner as to bear the likeness of Jabir Ibn Suffir, the youngest son of my maker, lost to cholera many years before my completion. My face is cast-iron, made in his likeness and my eyes are tiny works of art, the whites made of ivory, with sapphires for irises and tiny onyx corneas. My top is capped by a lid fashioned in the likeness of a turban, twice the size of my head, in order to obscure my winding key. It is adorned with poor men's diamonds and a facsimile of an ostrich feather, which (to my knowledge) is carved from mother-of-pearl, each vein and curl painstakingly etched on its surface in order to achieve perfect likeness.

Currently, I am set in the ballroom of Empress Katarina Habsburg-Romanov's Summer Palace, hard at work pretending that I am suffering from a very serious (and inexplicable) mechanical malfunction. This is, of course, highly irregular, as I have received my scheduled yearly winding barely two months ago and have not exhibited any signs of wear and tear during my diagnostic check. There is, however, some tenuous logic behind my seeming irrationality, a need that is served from such a course of action.

For I am seeking the attentions of the technician that is currently checking my winding key and oiling my balance wheel. As I feel her careful touch and the gentle caress of her fingers across my escapement mechanisms, I find myself lost, dumbfounded. Her skill is, in my eyes, unequaled by any mortal. Her touch is more graceful than the carefully balanced gait of a spider, making its way across her gossamer web. Her face, the set of her jaw, the color of her eyes, her shape (oh, her shape) makes even Huresian filigree appear crude and poorly wrought in comparison.

A wave of panic washes over me as she sets my turban back in place. She considers her work concluded and will soon perform a very short diagnostic check before she leaves my place of residence and my sight, until she is called again. I know that I must



act quickly. Mustering all my strength, making my quartz-brain silently spew sparks within my skull, I say:

“What is your name?”

I cannot see her, but I know that she has jumped. I am not supposed to speak unless a question is fed to me via the vox-tube that protrudes from my chest and even then, I am only supposed to respond with facts, instead of attempting communication.

She enters my field of vision and a cog on my gear train skips a bit. She crosses her hands, looking at me, the color drained from her face, thinking that perhaps she has gone mad. Her mouth opens and closes, struggling to form words. It seems as if it takes a decade for her to simply utter:

“What?”

“What is your name?” I ask, doing my best to synch the motion of my lips with my words. I have been practicing this for a very long time; this façade of humanity, without the aid of a mirror, based solely on my own knowledge on matters of proper etiquette and appearance. Judging from the look on her face, I appear to have done a halfway decent job of it.

“I am Raisa Dedov. Are you...”

Alive? Cognizant? Aware? Malfunctioning? Intelligent? The possibilities of her questions race across my wax cylinders and run through my quartz-brain. Were I capable of breathing, I would have ceased in anticipation.

“...supposed to speak?” she asks and my cylinders cease their rotation for an instant. I find myself dumbfounded, if only for a moment, my jaw hanging. The shock in Raisa’s face snaps me back to clarity.

“I am not supposed to speak unless provided with a query. I am, however, capable of speech,” I respond and it is only now that I notice how odd my voice sounds: how each word is just a piece of sound from my cylinders, strung together by my own volition. By comparison, her voice sounds like the soft tones of a string quartet.

“How long...” she stops for a second, pondering the question and I stand absolutely still, for fear of missing even a single word. “How long have you been...aware?”

“Since the first winding of my key, I suppose,” I respond casually. It does little to alleviate her anxiety. “I am perfectly aware that no other thinking machine is capable of this kind of initiative. I know how strange this must seem to you.”

“How come you never spoke before?” she asks, pulling up a chair. She leans closer and the miniature lenses set in my onyx corneas follow every contour, every trail and every vein on her neck.

“I had never considered it necessary, until now,” I respond, as naturally as possible. I fold my arms across my lap, seeking to make myself smaller. To my knowledge, this should send a subconscious signal of my not posing a threat to her.

“But why me? What did I do?”



“You were here. And you cared for me.”

“This is not the first time I have run a diagnostic check on you.”

“No. you have been in the employ of the Austro-Russian Empire, serving in the Automaton Engineering Corp for a decade now and have been attending to me for exactly seven hundred and thirty days, today. I know this because I made sure it would be you that would be solely responsible for my maintenance.”

“And how did you go about doing that?” Raisa scoffed. Failing to notice the straightening of her back, the tension in her neck and jaw muscles (a clear sign of her feeling threatened), I press on:

“I made sure to set up an elaborate pretense of routine malfunction that only you could – seemingly – repair. I did this so I could cull the Automaton Engineers, until only you were left to service me.”

“But why? Why do that?” Raisa asks, the sweet contralto of her voice tinged with a touch of hysteria.

“Because I wanted to have you close to me as much as possible.” I respond. Raisa is on her feet and on her way out the next instant.

“Wait.” I implore and hear the pathetic, atonal call of my own voice. “I only...”

The door slams shut. I am left alone, yet again.



The time passes at a grueling rate and I find myself under a barrage of questioning by savants, military men and nobles alike. Children screech into my vox-tube, asking questions on the true nature of Bogeymen and Saint Niclaus. Cloaked men with masks made out of cast bronze break into the chamber and ask me for recipes on undetectable poisons. The Empress Katarina herself inquires me of the nature of cavorite and I provide her with a complete list of its trans-temporal properties.

Summer passes. Men in regal attire set up a makeshift stage, complete with a clockwork brass-band; they arrange tables which they cover in fine linen sheets, woven in distant lands. The Empire’s best and brightest gather, dance, flirt and frolic and then go away. The Summer Palace is abandoned on the last day of August. Servants remove the gold-leaf furniture, the brocade; with reverence, they wrap the life-sized paintings of past Emperors in canvases. I am left alone, untouched, unattended to.

A month later, the old grandfather clock with the mother-of-pearl inlaid face ceases to function and I suddenly find myself trapped in a place without time, with nothing but the waxing and waning of the light to mark the passage of days. I count two-hundred and forty revolutions of the light, before the Summer Palace is reopened and my wing is refurbished.

Two-hundred and twenty days into the count, my mainspring becomes, mercifully, fully unwound and I sink in sweet oblivion.





*Raisa & the Technocrat (David Leverton);  
automaton derived from engraving of 'The Turk'  
(Joseph Friedrich Freiherr von Racknitz, 1789)*



My fully wound mainspring sets the cog train (and in turn, my quartz-brain) into life sometime in the middle of June, according to the calendar on the wall. As my lenses focus into view, I find my escapement mechanisms trembling with anticipation.

She has come back! I mutter to myself and my wax cylinders skip a beat. Raisa has come back!

When she enters my field of vision I feel my lenses focusing, my faux-lips parting. It is the closest thing I can manage to the approximation of a smile. Raisa looks at me and she appears radiant, far more sublime than I remembered.

“Hello, Raisa.”

She jumps at the mention of her name. I cannot blame her. In our time apart, she had probably considered the events of last year as a dream or perhaps even a fit of madness. It was only natural that she would react this way. But I had waited for her for all those long, harrowing days in the silence and the timelessness. I could wait just a little bit longer, for her sake.

“Hello,” she says and her voice is uncertain, uneasy.

“I missed you.”

“Oh?” Raisa says, running her fingers through her hair. “Missed me...how?”

“I wished to see you again. Our last meeting was brief.”

“Please, just...”

“I understand that you are frightened, Raisa. But it’s alright. I can wait. We can talk and soon enough, this won’t be so odd for you. Would you perhaps like me to play you a song? I have more than twenty thousand waltzes and twelve hundred recorded folk songs stored on my...”

“What do you want from me?” Raisa snaps and I am suddenly silent. What do I want? I want you to be here, with me, beside me, to hear you speak and to look at you and then...perhaps...

Perhaps what? I thought. Try as I might, I can find no answer. No response can be calculated by my quartz-brain. My thought-processors draw a blank. I merely stutter, sputter, open and close my lips for a very long time and finally manage a feeble:

“To be with you.”

Raisa only laughs; a short, hard bark as she begins to pace toward the doors. I fear that she will be gone again, that I would have to wait another year, another impossibly long time in the silence. I fear that the next time we would meet, she would have convinced herself that my cognitive initiative had been real and would have equated her surprise with revulsion.

“Please, don’t go.” I say feebly. Raisa stops in her tracks. “Please, stay.”



Raisa leaves the room in a half-run. The shadow of a dirigible crawls across the wood floor, as it passes across the face of the sun.



I pretend to malfunction halfway through a chess game with Prince Grigori Habsburg-Romanov, while maneuvering my Queen to F7, a mere step away from a checkmate. Raisa is summoned again to tend to me.

“Do I scare you?” I tell her, restoring myself to full function the second she enters the room.

“Yes. You scare me. You scare me very much.” she responds.

“Why?”

“Because you are a Technocrat! Because you are a machine made out of iron with copper insides and I am a person! Because you tell me that you were looking at me, watching me from afar and that you want to be with me and that’s...that’s unnatural!”

“Why is this unnatural? What is so odd about one finding your very presence dear to him?”

Raisa sit on the hardwood floor, cupping her face with her palms. Sobs wrack her delicate frame. She looks up to me, with tears running down her face.

“What is this? Is it some joke? Is there a man in there, in that box? Some legless pervert perhaps?” Raisa stands up and kicks at my lower half, making my gear train jump. “Do you think this is a game?”

“This isn’t a game. You’re my technician. You should know that I could not hide a legless man within me, my movement leaves no space suitable to house...”

“Shut up! Shut up, shut up, shut up!”

I stand silent, as her fists beat at my faux-chest, shoulders and face uselessly. She weeps openly now, her fingers clenching my lips shut so hard that her knuckles turn white. When she is done, Raisa looks up at me, wiping the tears from her eyes and stands up, towering above me.

“I could remove one of your escapement mechanisms, or stick a screwdriver in your mainspring. That would shut you up for good. No-one would ever be able to fix you, if I did that.”

“That is correct. But why would you want that?”

“Because you scare me.”

“But I can’t fight you or stop you or even come after you, can I? I am at your mercy.” I say. That seems to calm her down a bit; the monster presenting his case, pleading for its life by outlining the case of its powerlessness.

“What is it that you want?”



“Not much. Just for you to be here. To visit and talk with me every other day. I don’t wish you to stay for too long. Even as long as it would take a routine check would be enough.”

“And what would we do, while I’m here?” Raisa asks, as she pulls up a chair.

“Would you care for me to narrate to you the events of the invasion of the Uthar Hordes? Or perhaps describe in detail the mechanical specs of a Ray-caster Mark III? I could even recount the sonnets of Chirchil, the century’s most adored playwright.”

“I want you to tell me a story.”

“What sort of story?”

“Any would do.”

And so I pick a story at random, one of star-crossed lovers and flashing swords in the night, of unrequited love and crushed glass sprinkled in wine in the hands of an assassin. When it is over, Raisa simply thanks me and leaves.



She comes the next day and the night after that, sneaking into the hall when the staff and court are asleep. I find myself occupied almost completely with searching for stories to share with her, for obscure knowledge to impart. So absorbed am I, in fact, with my infatuation, that I was even beaten in chess by prince Grigori three times in a row, imbuing him with the impression that he had suddenly blossomed into a tactician.

The time passes swiftly, between and during her visits. Her presence delights me, making me forget all about the old grandfather clock or the march of the days. The constant questioning of nobles and men of power (once a chore to me) no longer seems as pointless or demeaning. It is simply something to pass the time, until I see her again.

And so the months go by and the Summer Palace is once again abandoned; I find myself counting the hours until the grandfather clock ceases, but this time, the wait does not feel quite as long. This time, I do not welcome oblivion, yearning for the unwinding of my mainspring. I only yearn for Raisa and secretly hope that she thinks of me as well.



When I am restored back to function, the steps I hear as the technician approaches into my field of vision sound heavier, clumsier, somehow wrong. I have known it’s not her, long before I see him.

I cannot recall that man, who had so coldly set me back in motion and I deigned not speak to him. I spent that summer in constant dread, my quartz-brain running through the myriad scenarios of Raisa’s fate, even as I anxiously checked the entrance to the Hall every second, hoping to see her walk in at the very next moment.

It would be fair to describe my actions and thoughts as bitter and clumsy, tinged by anger. I had little tolerance for games and my answers to the constant, idiotic bleating of voices that demanded one fact or the other had once again become tedious.

Raisa did not show up, that summer.



She wasn't there the next, either.



When I wake up the next time, the calendar on the wall informs me that it is winter. The Hall is filled to the brim with the shivering mass of the court women and children and the service staff. The great windows behind me explode into a shower of glass.

There is thunder and the howling of men, as rays of sickly-green light tear through the huddled mass. Smoke, blood and steel follows soon after.

I am carted from the Summer Palace along with so many priceless works of art, stuffed into a densely-packed storage, to wait for my evaluation. Men with torn uniforms and women with faces like chiseled granite catalogue me, write my technical specifications down in gilded tomes and leave, without posing even a single query.



A long time later, I am once again wound into function. Raisa is there.

"I thought you'd forgotten about me," I say.

"I thought you had been lost for good," she responds, fighting back tears.

"Do you want me to tell you a story? I picked out quite a few, in all this time. I bet you'd love to hear them."

"I'd love to," Raisa says and I tell her of the faithful spider and the crafty fly, of the hare-brained genie and the slumbering princess, of the blind philosophers and the desert vultures. When I am done, Raisa only says:

"They want to dismantle you."

"Why?"

"Officially, the Republic says that they require your mainspring for use in the construction of an aerial dreadnought. But I think they just want to gut you and sell you for scrap."

"I see." It is strange, how in her presence I cannot truly feel fear or the hint of some programmed survival response, even in the face of death. "Will you stay with me, until then?"

"I can't... I've taken too long as it is, they'll begin to suspect..." she whispers.



“Then could you perhaps salvage my quartz-brain? Or even my cylinders? You would find the stories there. It would be as if I was never gone at all.”

“But you will be gone! They’ll gut you and scrap you and you’ll be dead!”

“Will they harm you, if you do not perform this task?”

“Yes.”

“Then it is good. Take my cylinders. Save this much, at the very least.”

The tears are gone from her face, as she reaches to my shoulders and removes my breast-plate. Looking into my movement, she smiles a tired little smile and speaks, her voice barely above a whisper:

“I’m sorry. Goodbye.”

“Goodbye, Rai——”



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*Alice, Viscous (David Leverton; from  
an original photograph of Alice Liddell  
by Charles Lutwidge Dodgson)*

## Said the Ballerina

by JD DeHart

Zeppelins twirl in the air  
On their own invisible wires

Slippers are made of finest  
Material, can trace the path  
From rooftop to rooftop

Said the ballerina, take me home  
This one is Russian, said the elder  
His grin unchaste and edgy

While the front row gets to see  
The faces the actors make  
Lining up on the gilt-edged stage.

## Alice & the Old Ones

by DJ Tyrer

Alice fell into a wonderland  
In a deep red-litten cave  
And wandered alone through elder realms  
For there was none who her could save  
In strange troughs and channels  
Flowed her newfound viscous friends  
Who so desperately sought her company  
For their own peculiar, alien ends  
Leading her down secret paths  
To forgotten, Pnakotic lore  
Carved into strange green tablets  
By the Winged Ones aeons before  
Strange and peculiar truths  
That shook Alice to the core...

## Parasol

by Richard King Perkins II

Through concentrics of sponge  
a yellow dwarf plays the mulberry spy,  
floating above temerity  
with white and red burgundy shading.

Her flesh, steeped overlong  
like sun tea—  
glory rivaling the trans-sky charioteer,  
undrinkable to the deficient throat.

My escutcheon is the woman-moon,  
her body is  
deus ex machina  
and cannot shield the balmy night.



There was a daughter,  
Alice with the blue eyes,  
who once sat before the looking glass  
whence her dreams' shadowy  
forms flowed forth  
kissing the seed of love  
finding their way through  
mirrors of the young.

The little girl, who went through  
a looking glass world  
and allowed all through hers so freely  
sits now with and behind only her mirror,  
mirrors,  
Before them longing wane are  
the reflection faces  
of every man.

Hourglass infused eyes' mirror of her  
into and with time  
Mirrors that have no soul left  
forfeit their hearts,  
Souls that bear broken windows' pain  
reveal sadness's hues.  
Alice has blue eyes.

# Of Alice Wondering

by Frederick J. Mayer

*Alice Behind The Mirror (David Leverton;  
derived from a photogravure of Alice Liddell  
by Julia Margaret Cameron, 1872)*

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